

Conversation with the Chairman

During my tenure as commissioner, I have witnessed many changes. Change often leads to opportunity.

In 2003, we privatized a county department while maintaining a vested interest in the care and services provided by the Johnson County Nursing Center in Olathe. Established in 1864 as the county “poor farm,” the center’s purpose has always been to provide for those without family or financial means.

Since that change, the center, as a nonprofit organization, has continued to provide high-quality care and service to Johnson County residents, including people with limited assets. The center also took on a second mission: to advance the field of aging through education about person-directed care, best practices, and workforce enhancements.

Today, six years later, the Johnson County Nursing Home has a new, grown-up name to go along with its flourishing operation. It is now called Evergreen Community of Johnson County. Its nonprofit corporate name has changed from Friends of Johnson County Nursing Center to Evergreen Living Innovations, Inc., or ELI.

The educational component, commonly known as GERTI, remains GERTI because that name is increasingly well-known. It originally stood for “Geriatric Education Resource and Training Institute.” Now, however, GERTI means “Grow with Evergreen Resources for Transforming Innovations.” The new acronym reflects GERTI’s goal of helping organizations and their staff members support the philosophy of resident-directed care and transforming the field of aging through innovative ideas and technologies.

ELI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that operates two programs: Evergreen Community of Johnson County (the 112-resident skilled nursing home) and GERTI.

The name change was another step in honoring with dignity the residents who live at Evergreen Community. “Evergreen” was chosen because its meaning reflects the organization’s rich history, “remaining fresh, lively and interesting despite age, long enduring.” The word “Evergreen” joins the organization’s past and future and its two divisions, and indicates the organization’s passion for innovation in aging services.

GERTI’s development was based on a 1992 Eldernet study in Johnson County and the management team’s passion for improving the field of aging. Since its establishment in 2003, GERTI has fostered nearly 1,800 students from 189 organizations, providing educational programs to all health care organizations in Johnson County (a list of programs is available at www.gerti.org).

GERTI’s staff also provides training throughout Kansas and has presented programs on its best practices for audiences in Salt Lake City; Washington, D.C.; Orlando, Fla.; Philadelphia; Charlotte, N.C.; San Antonio; Tan-Tar-A Resort in Osage Beach, Mo.; and St. Louis. This year, presentations will be made in Chicago; Hershey, Pa., Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas.

Evergreen Community embraces the person-directed care philosophy of allowing residents to direct their own activities of daily living in their sections of the facility, known as “neighborhoods.” Evergreen Community has been innovative in developing schedules that promote balance of life for employees and consistency of care for residents

while reducing employee turnover from 112 percent to 48 percent. More information about Evergreen Community is available at www.ecojc.org.

So, when you see the names “Evergreen Living Innovations,” “GERTI,” and “Evergreen Community of Johnson County,” you can be proud of what we have achieved here for our elders. The names are new, but Johnson County’s commitment to compassion, care, and excellence in services to the aging remains a long-standing tradition.

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